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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 KATHMANDU 000456

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS AND DS/IP/NEA  
STATE ALSO PLEASE PASS USAID/DCHA/OFDA  
STATE ALSO PLEASE PASS PEACE CORPS HQ  
USAID FOR ANE/AA GORDON WEST AND JIM BEVER  
MANILA FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA  
LONDON FOR POL/GURNEY  
TREASURY FOR GENERAL COUNSEL/DAUFHAUSER AND DAS JZARATE  
TREASURY ALSO FOR OFAC/RNEWCOMB AND TASK FORCE ON TERRORIST  
FINANCING  
JUSTICE FOR OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL/DLAUFMAN  
NSC FOR MILLARD  
SECDEF FOR OSD/ISA LILLENFELD

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON NEPAL'S MAOIST INSURGENCY, MARCH 5-12,  
2004

REFERENCE: (A) KATHMANDU 0397  
(B) KATHMANDU 0437  
(C) KATHMANDU 0424

#### SUMMARY

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1. Maoists reportedly attempted again to attack the headquarters of the eastern district of Bhojpur, the scene of last week's deadly assault by the rebels (Ref A). A joint security team launched military offensives in the far-west. Ten security personnel were killed and thirty-nine injured in separate attacks by Maoists. Two civilians also were killed. Security forces reportedly killed twelve rebels. Maoists released eight security personnel who had been abducted during last week's engagement in Bhojpur. The Home Minister lashed out at the media for boosting the morale of the Maoists by "exaggerating" Maoist activities. Humanitarian agencies continue to suffer fallout from the insurgency. Maoists reportedly have set up military training camps and intensified recruitment campaigns in schools. Journalists allege censorship and threats from both the Government of Nepal (GON) and the Maoists. Three civilians were killed by Maoists. The Kathmandu Valley endured yet another Bandh (general closure) on March 8, which was preceded by several bombs. The total number of surrendered Maoists is now 670 since the announcement of GON's amnesty program. End Summary.

#### MAOISTS STRIKE BHOJPUR AGAIN

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2. On March 8, Maoists reportedly attempted again to attack the headquarters of the eastern district of Bhojpur, the scene of last week's deadly ambush by the rebels (Ref A). According to press reports, the insurgents fired on the District Police Office, but retreated after security forces returned fire. That clash lasted thirty minutes. The region is still reeling in the aftermath of the March 2 bloody battle. Damage to infrastructure has been estimated at almost USD 500,000, and residents no longer have electricity or phone service. The district is also facing a water shortage.

#### OFFENSIVE IN THE WEST

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3. On March 8, the local press reported that a joint security team launched military offensives in Maoist-controlled areas of the far-western district of Achham. Officials from the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) Mid-West Division Headquarters said the combined teams were focusing on thirteen Village Development Committees (VDC) that had fallen under Maoist control. Offices, warehouses and community centers used by the rebels reportedly were destroyed by the security forces during their offensive.

4. Twelve Maoists reportedly were killed this week during other security operations: two in the western district of Parbat on March 11; two female insurgents in the northern district of Gorkha and one female Maoist in Chitwan District on March 10; one in Chitwan on March 10; two in the eastern districts of Sarlahi and Sindhupalchowk on March 9; and four in the eastern districts of Dhankuta and Panchthar on March 17.

5. Ten security personnel also were killed and thirty-nine injured this week: three Royal Nepal Army (RNA) soldiers were injured in the central district of Nawalparasi on March 11; one soldier was killed and six injured by a landmine in the northern district of Taplejung on March 9; Maoist

ambushes in Banke District and Kaski District killed nine and injured twenty-seven on March 10; four security personnel were injured and two civilians killed when Maoists ambushed a hearse in Banke District on March 5. Ironically, the hearse was carrying the body of one of the soldiers killed in the Maoist ambush in Bhojpur.

#### WEST UNDER MAOIST BLOCKADE

16. On March 8, several ethnic Maoist-affiliated organizations initiated a blockade in thirteen districts throughout the west and mid-west region of Nepal (Ref B). Curfews and economic embargos have been imposed and the villagers are restricted from traveling to district headquarters. The rebels reportedly also have blocked highways, including both highways from Kathmandu to India, with toppled electric poles and trees, preventing the flow of commercial and passenger vehicles. Initial press reports have said that the rebels are running their own checkpoints, set fire to a passenger bus, and torched a drinking water and sanitation office on the first day of the blockades. The reasons for the blockades, which are expected to continue for fifteen days, are unclear, but some senior officials believe they are intended to prevent the population in that region from traveling to meet the King during his scheduled visit to Pokhara later this month.

#### MAOISTS RELEASE SECURITY PERSONNEL

17. On March 10, Maoists reportedly released eight security personnel who had been abducted following the rebels' massed attack at the district headquarters in Bhojpur on March 2 (Ref A). Two others reportedly were released the previous day. According to a March 9 press report, the bodies of two security personnel believed also to have been abducted were discovered: a police constable and security guard. On March 5, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) had issued an appeal for the release of the security personnel.

18. A standing committee member of the Raj Parishad (Royal Council) abducted by Maoists last week in Rautahat District has been released after he agreed to resign from his post. Prior to his abduction, the rebels had bombed his house and demanded his resignation. The NHRC condemned the abduction as "inhuman conduct."

#### HOME MINISTER LASHES OUT AT MEDIA

19. During a press conference on March 10, Home Minister Kamal Thapa, who is also the Information and Communications Minister, complained that the media are boosting the morale of the Maoists by "exaggerating" their activities, and urged the media to verify facts before reporting "Maoist propaganda." Minister Thapa cautioned people against listening to rumors, and said security forces are prepared to protect them.

#### MAOISTS DISRUPTING HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS

110. On March 8, Maoists torched two vehicles carrying medicine and supplies to a health camp in the western district of Dailekh. According to the occupants of the vehicles, the rebels forced them out of the cars before torching them. Maoists reportedly also opened fire on an ambulance in the Maoist stronghold of Dang District, also in the west. The nationwide closure on March 8 stranded hundreds of patients who had traveled to the central district of Baglung for a free health camp after doctors failed to arrive citing security concerns.

111. Maoists in Dang District reportedly also issued a press statement on March 11 that all NGO and INGO activities will be required to meet nine criteria, and would not be allowed to do anything without prior permission of the Maoists. The rebels warned that any organization failing to comply would be forced to leave the area.

112. Humanitarian assistance in the eastern districts of Dolakha, Sindhupalchowk, Kavre, and Ramechhap also has been affected by Maoist violence. Threats and pressure from the rebels have caused many human rights activists, social workers and teachers to flee to district headquarters unable to assist those most in need. Extortion demands by the Maoists are also threatening to disrupt services provided by UN agencies. On March 12, the UN agencies released a statement reiterating its policy of not complying with extortion demands, and warned that continued attempts to extract money could put the future of development programs at risk. The statement was published in both vernacular and English language newspapers.

#### MAOIST CENTERS IN SCHOOLS

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113. A newspaper article published on March 9 reports that Maoists in the western districts of Rolpa, Rukum, Pyuthan, and Jajarkot have set up military training camps in public schools. The insurgents claim they have already trained 1500 students with many more undergoing training. An executive of the education office was quoted in the article as being aware of the "militia training in the school compounds," but would try to continue educating the children. Many of the students have stopped attending classes, however, out of fear of Maoist recruitment (septel).

114. Maoists reportedly have also intensified their campaign to recruit youths in the villages of Baglung District in the west. According to reports, the rebels are forcibly recruiting students to join their militia, and have imposed evening curfews in 12 of the Village Development Committees (VDC) throughout the district. Maoists reportedly control most of the VDCs in the district. Baglung District is one of the districts in the west currently under the Maoist blockade program.

#### JOURNALISTS FACE CENSORSHIP

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115. On March 11, the Committee To Protect Journalists (CPJ), based in New York, issued a report stating that since the collapse of the ceasefire in August both the Government of Nepal (GON) and the Maoists are interfering with freedom of the press. The report cites the murders of, and threats against, journalists by Maoists and the alleged illegal detention of journalists by the GON as causing "fear and self-censorship."

116. Maoists reportedly also have restricted journalists from entering the mid-western district of Rukum. The insurgents told the journalists they needed permission before being allowed entry into the area. The Federation of Nepalese Journalists have also pulled out of the eastern district of Sindhupalchok after threats by Maoists.

#### MAOIST VIOLENCE NOT SLOWING

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117. Civilians continue to get caught in the violence of the Maoist insurgency. On March 6, Maoists killed a teacher in the eastern district of Bara and then cut his ears off. On that same day, an employee of the district court in Dadeldhura died after the rebels detonated a bomb inside the court. On March 9, again in Bara District, Maoists gunned down a civilian. Surprisingly, several villagers retaliated and killed one of the Maoists.

118. A group of twenty Maoists made off with almost USD 50,000 worth of jewelry, cash and clothes after robbing a store in Chitwan District. Local business owners claim security forces are unable to offer protection, resulting in a dramatic increase in crime.

#### ANOTHER MAOIST-CALLED "BANDH"

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119. The Kathmandu Valley endured yet another strike (bandh) on March 8 called by the All Nepal Women's Association Revolutionary, a sister organization of the Maoists (Ref C). In the days preceding the bandh, several bombs were exploded in the Kathmandu Valley, including Thamel, one of the main tourist hubs. Two people suffered injuries in the March 5 blast. On March 7 suspected Maoists also exploded a bomb inside an empty bus at one of the valley's main bus parks and also at a government building. Maoist supremo Prachanda has called for a nationwide closure on April 6-8.

120. On March 5, the United Nations (UN) issued a press statement that the frequent bandhs hinder services to the "most needy populations," and therefore its agencies would continue to use vehicles even during so-called bandh days.

#### SURRENDERED MAOISTS FACE DIFFICULTIES

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121. Recently surrendered Maoists are complaining of monotony and unfulfilled promises at the Government of Nepal's (GON) rehabilitation center in the eastern district of Tanahun. The former Maoists allege that no training has been offered, and that they are constantly guarded by security personnel making it seem "like a prison here." On March 8, the Chief District Officer of Tanahun announced that a three-month training in house wiring and cutting had been organized in response to inmates' requests.

122. Eighteen Maoists from Sindhuli District, the largest number from that district, were among those who surrendered this week. The total number surrendered is now 670 since

the announcement of the Government of Nepal's (GON) amnesty program. The amnesty program's deadline has been extended to April 12.

MALINOWSKI